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Slide causes havoc

Wave 6 Apr 78

Wet spring spells trouble for track; drainage problems plague canyon

Spring run-off, and a mudslide in Provo Canyon have done an estimated \$75,000 damage to the railroad track used by the Heber Creeper.

The most extensive damage occurred over a period of several weeks near Hoover's Ranch about one mile below Deer Creek Dam. A slowly-moving slide has pushed the track off its alignment, lifting the uphill rail and covering it with earth (see related story on this page).

Further up the canyon, above and below the dam, three other long sections of track were badly twisted when the fill supporting them was eroded by high water.

"The damage is just unbelievable," commented economic consultant Monte Bona, who is project coordinator for a \$500,000 federal grant received last fall for track renovation.

Bona noted the Economic Development

Administration had earmarked the grant for "general track improvement" and not for emergency repair.

He said because the Creeper leased the railroad right-of-way from the State Parks Department and Department of Transportation, efforts were being made to obtain repair funds from those agencies.

If state funds were not available, Bona said he would request E.D.A. modify the grant to include the repairs. He noted that Railroad Builders Inc., contractor on the grant, was scheduled to begin work next Monday.

Despite the damage, Heber Creeper President Lowe Ashton said Monday he was optimistic the repairs would not delay the start of the train's tourist runs.

"We don't anticipate it from preventing us from opening, as usual, on Mother's Day," he said.

New road may have changed runoff pattern

Heavy amounts of precipitation and a new private road constructed in the Hoover's Ranch area are being blamed for a slide in Provo Canyon which has already destroyed much of one lane of Highway 189 and damaged a segment of railroad track.

Jim West, District Six Engineer for the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT), said that the new road above the highway has caused a change in the drainage patterns in the area. The runoff is now bypassing four drains which cross underneath the highway.

According to West, the water has been running along the north side of the highway to a fifth drain. That drain eventually became silted up, forcing the water to find its own way under the road. It is at this point, below the fifth drain, that the major damage has occurred.

UDOT geologist Stan Thayne pointed out that slides at this point are not unusual.

"It's an old trouble area," he said. "It's been sliding for many years."

Thayne said that the railroad and the top layer of soil are resting on a strata of material which has a high clay content.

"When that becomes lubricated with moisture, then it's a plane on which the road bed slides on down."

Because of dry weather for the two years preceding this spring, Thayne said that there had been very little movement for some time.

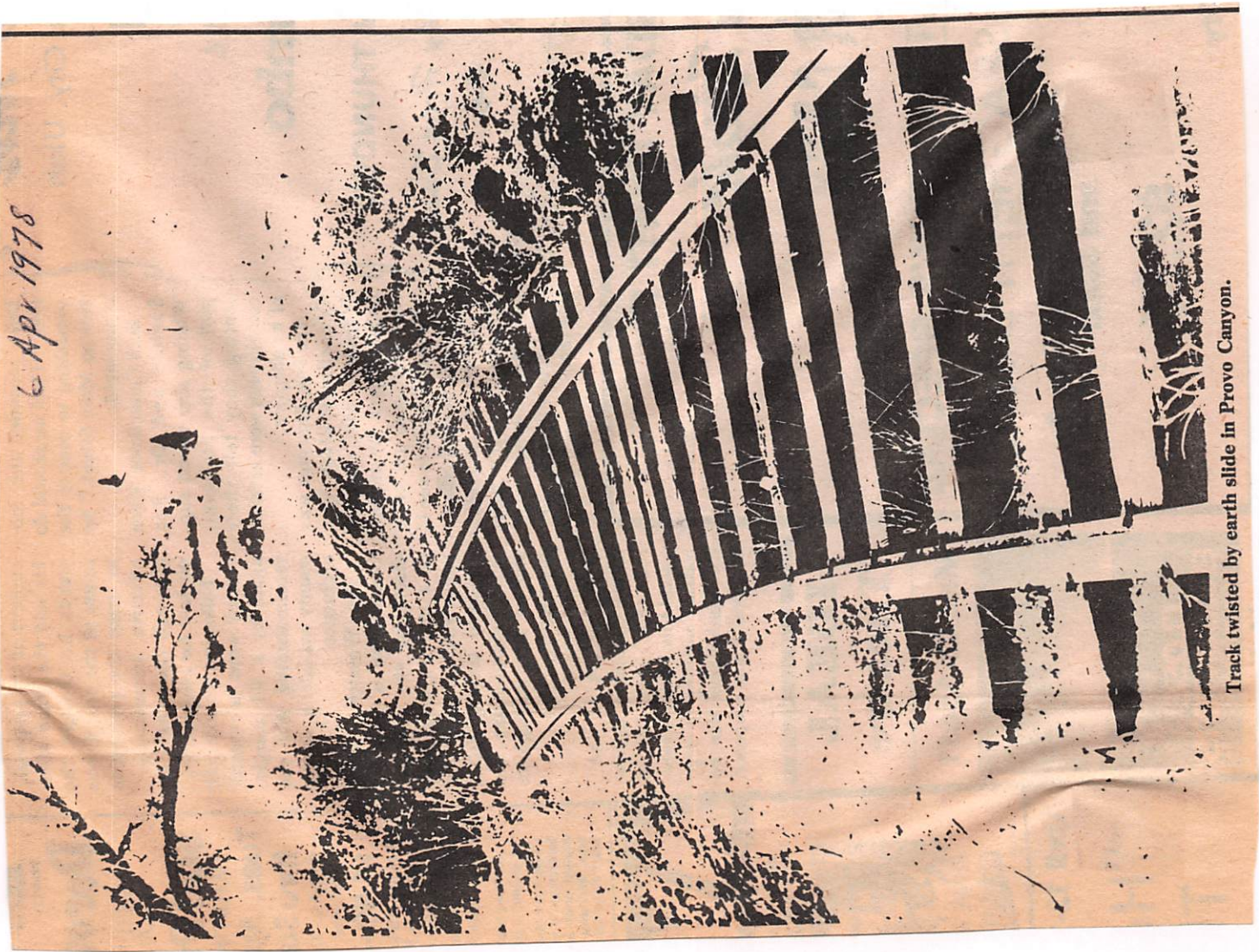
"It's held now for several years."

Thayne pointed out that there are seeps along the hillside, which could have contributed to the moisture problem. And he agreed with West that the new private road may have played a part.

"There was a lot of water running down the road," he said. "It did change the drainage pattern."

"Whether the state's drainage system was handling it properly before, I don't really know."

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Track twisted by earth slide in Provo Canyon.

It's even more exciting riding the Creeper now

By Kris Radish
Deseret News
correspondent

HEBER CITY — The seats are cold, the hot cider is really warm cider and the train leaves late. But the view from the frosty windows is great.

The Heber Creeper has been running special Christmas trains for the past three weeks. Santa Claus, herds of deer, little snowshoe rabbits and a view of the Wasatch winter wonderland are part of the ride.

Lowell Ashton, president of Heber Creeper Corp., says this is the first year trains have run after the close of the summer season.

"If you think about it there are really more tourists in this area because of the skiing in the winter than in the summer," Ashton said. "We decided to try and keep the trains in working order and do some special Christmas runs."

Special they are.

Ashton had pot belly stoves installed in all of the train cars. Instead of cold soda pop, hot chocolate and cider are in the dining car. Halfway through the Christmas train ride Santa appears with a guitar and candy canes, and what you can see out of those train windows is indescribable.

"So far the response has been great," Ashton said. "We have lowered the rates and we have a special family price."

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The cover of snow is just one of the beauties seen by passengers on new Heber Creeper wintertime runs.

The train has been running at 12:30 p.m. and 2:30 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays. There seems to be many families — a lot without small children — line up on the loading dock, all bundled up in wool, ready for a ride into winter.

The Creeper route follows the Deer Creek Reservoir and the tracks are nestled against a sloping mountain. The ride takes about 1½ hours and runs to the Deer Creek dam in Provo Canyon.

Inside the train are 100

moms, dads, boyfriends, girlfriends, grandpas, grandmas and big-eyed kids.

When the train whistles by the first herd of deer everyone goes crazy. There are 200 fingers on all of the windows. "Look at the deer, look at the deer," is shouted from car to car.

Later the train engineer has to bring the train to a dead stop because one stubborn deer won't get off the tracks. Everyone on the train squeals.

"I've been working on the train now for five years," said stewardess Diana Hatfield. "I don't think I have seen people enjoy the train as much as I have on these Christmas runs. You should see those kids when Santa jumps down from the engine and visits the cars," he said.

It's hard to say who is happier when that happens, the kids or mom and dad. Old Santa hustles up the skinny train-car aisles and every child on the train gets to tell

him what he wants for Christmas.

The excitement of the train ride, Santa Claus, Christmas carols and candy canes are almost too much for most of the children on the train.

"Oh this is such fun," one blue-eyed girl said. "All I ever wanted to do was just see Santa Claus, and did you see him, he came right on this train."

Besides the deer, kids and Santa, the view out of those old train windows is enough to make anyone happy.